

**BUILDING ON THE BASICS**  
*Leadership, Local Governance and Nation-Building*  
*By: Antonio La Viña and Joy Aceron*

**Summary**

Devolving power to local governments has been good for the Philippines. But the best practice cases in local governance are only a start in reforming the Philippines; they are insufficient when they remain confined with the limits of their respective local government units (LGUs). Unless these local successes are scaled up and connected, their impact will be limited and isolated. They will not alter long-standing power relations that have kept our people poor and our country in a perpetual state of underdevelopment.

To overcome the limits of scattered and decentralized actions in sustaining reforms and expanding impact, efforts should also be directed to establishing modern democratic institutions at the national level. What is needed is a nation-building process which cannot be a top-down initiative led by a national elite of political leaders or vanguard parties. What is required is to change the country from the base—place by place, island by island—wherein local reform leaders are conscious of the need to connect their efforts, share a common vision for the country, and eventually execute a coordinated strategy of capturing power at the national level.

The movement for nation-building would have to be led by reformist leaders from the different LGUs, the bureaucracy, the citizens' groups, and even among the circles of some modernizing elites. They would have to develop a system of synergy and interdependence whose best organizational expression is a political party or political party coalition that unifies all the progressive and democratic elements in Philippines society. This is a formidable challenge, but it has to be done. By building on the basics, we will change the Philippines.

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*The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.*  
Antonio Gramsci *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935).

*We need national leaders; the best we can get. But make no mistake: it is local and regional community leaders that our people need most of all. Not leaders who reside in some distant capital, out of touch with them, out of their reach, but leaders who are right here with them, who know them and whom they know; who understand their problems, their hopes, their dreams, and who can, because of the education they have received, give substance to these hopes and dreams.*  
Horacio dela Costa S.J. Commencement Speech, Ateneo de Davao (1953)

The Philippines is a work in progress. The Filipino process of nation-building is far from complete, and that the state institutions that we now have are far from the ideal Weberian type. National political elites have disappointed many for their abuses and for their failure to deliver good results that are felt on the ground.

It is perhaps for this reason that reformers have increasingly relied on local governments and citizens' groups to deliver the needed services that supposed to be provided by a modern democratizing and developmental state. These, for their part, have yielded significant results, and have often created "best practices" that are lauded both here in the Philippine and abroad.

In this paper, we argue that best practices of local governance are an excellent, necessary building block for nation building, for building a prosperous and just society. But these best practices are not in themselves sufficient in creating long-term, sustainable reforms. If they remain small patches of good governance and are unable to scale up to alter long-standing power relationships that have kept our people poor and the country in a state of perpetual underdevelopment, the good experiences of local governance will stay that way – local, isolated, and from a national perspective, ultimately irrelevant.

Building on the basics is critical. An agenda to contest power at the national level ,through the formation of more democratic and consensual organizations, which connect all these local efforts to a national mosaic of change and reform is just as essential. This does not mean that the way forward is still a top-down approach led by a national elite of reformist leaders or cadres of whatever ideological stripes The way forward is to change the country from the base, place by place, island by island, but a conscious effort is

needed by the leaders of these initiatives to connect their efforts, share a common vision, and eventually execute a coordinated strategy of taking power at the national level. It will not happen overnight, it will take time, perhaps a few decades, but isn't that what nation-building is all about?

### **Consolidation of a Center**

In early 1971, a 150-page book supposedly penned by then-President Ferdinand Marcos appeared in the bookshops of Manila. Written shortly after the "assault" on Malacañang by the youthful radicals of Kabataang Makabayan (KM) on the night of January 26, 1970, *Today's Revolution: Democracy*, sought to address the ongoing tempest by proposing a "revolution from the center"—a process wherein the government is radically transformed in order to "make itself the faithful instrument of the people's revolutionary aspirations" (1971: 12).

Arguing that, "government in a democracy stands at the center—not above—the political community," (1971: 10) Marcos asserted that such a revolution is needed so as to alter the old oligarchic society and bring forth a "new society in which equality of opportunity is not a fraud but a fact" (1971: 120) of everyday life.

These assertions were soon put to practical use shortly after the declaration of Martial Law on September 21, 1972. In a live television address that was aired the following evening, the President justified his actions by claiming that "lawless elements" are now "waging armed insurrection and rebellion against the Government of the Republic of the Philippines in order to forcibly seize political and state power in the country, overthrow the duly constituted government, and supplant our existing political, social, economic and legal order." (Javate-de Dios et al.: 374).

Marcos then began a process of centralization. Arguing that centralizing state power into the executive department would result in better planning, smoother implementation and quick decision-making, Marcos took on legislative roles and issued numerous presidential decrees which had the force of law.

He also undertook a major restructuring of government bureaucracy by expanding the number of agencies directly under the Office of the President. In addition, numerous state corporations were also created during Martial Law which were meant to establish control over the different "strategic sectors" of the economy such as oil, electricity, banking, investments, transportation and fertilizer production.

Marcos also appointed Western-trained technocrats in key government positions, which allowed his government to achieve greater revenue collection, improved government planning and better planned development programs. The presence of these highly respected managers and economic planners also assuaged the fears of the both the middle class and the business community, and allowed the regime to gain credibility in the eyes of foreign governments.

But these initial successes were soon overtaken by the ill consequences of the very methods that were prescribed by Martial Law. The most indicative of these was the absence of any effective accountability mechanism, resulting in the unchecked exercise of executive prerogatives and grave abuses in the use of presidential privileges, leading to the fateful end of Martial Law and the downfall of Marcos in 1986.

### **The Beginning of Diffusion**

Seeing itself as the complete opposite of Marcos, the Aquino administration began to reverse the process the centralization that was undertaken by its predecessor shortly after assuming power in 1986. The new dispensation also ushered a renewed interest in devolution and decentralization, which was then used to dismantle the authoritarian instruments of Martial Law.

The Aquino period also marked the shift from *government* to *governance*, wherein the former is defined as the “machinery for making and enforcing collective decisions in society and elsewhere.” (Heywood 2002: 424). The latter, on the other hand, is best understood as the “various ways in which social life is coordinated, of which government is merely one” (2002: 424).

Filipino academic Ledivina Cariño further contends that “a government that rules relies on force to exact compliance” by enacting “laws binding on all inhabitants, and metes out sanctions according to these laws.” But with the overthrow of Marcos, people began viewing power “not so much wielded as shared, and authority is defined not so much by the control of the ruler as by the consent and participation of the governed.” (2003: 67).

This new way of thinking was best summed up in the new Constitution that was ratified in 1987. In Article X, Section 2 of the said document for instance, it was clearly stipulated that, “the territorial and political subdivisions shall enjoy local autonomy” (Bernas 2007: 208). This was again reiterated in Section 3, where the system of decentralized is supposed to be legislated through a local government code that ensures responsible and accountable local government structures.

In that same year, a decentralization proposal was prepared by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) which eventually led to the issuance of Administrative Order No. 71. Based on the said order, the Department was tasked to form a Joint Legislative-Executive Committee which would formulate policies on how the decentralization process will be overseen by the national government.

But the new administration’s commitment to local autonomy was most clearly manifested with the passage of Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC). Described by Alex Brillantes, Jr. as the “most radical and far-reaching policy” that is meant to address the country’s “over-centralized politico-administrative system” (2003: 329), the Code was not only designed to enhance the

authority of the country's sub-national units, but also to institutionalize citizens' participation in local decision-making.

In addition, LGC has five major features, namely: (1) the devolution of the responsibility for the delivery of basic services, previously being undertaken by the National Government; (2) enforcement of certain regulatory powers; (3) broadening of the revenue base of local government units (LGUs); (4) vesting LGUs with the authority to undertake entrepreneurial and developmental activities; and (5) the active participation of civil society in local governance. (Panadero 2006).

Passed on October 10, 1990, the Code was enacted on the assumption that a living and participatory democracy can best be achieved through the exercise of decentralized governance. Decentralization, for its part, is defined as "a state or condition in a governmental system where there is dispersal of power or authority from the center" (Brillantes 1987: 131). Embedded in the LGC, decentralization takes three forms, namely: deconcentration, devolution and debureaucratization.

By deconcentration, we refer to the transfer of "functions to lower level administrative units designated by the central office;" while devolution, on the other hand, can be defined as the transfer of power and authority from the central government to the LGUs, wherein the nature of power that is transferred is political, as well as financial. Lastly, debureaucratization is best described as the sharing of public functions and responsibilities with "units not within the purview of government," such people's organizations (POs), NGOs and the private sector (Brillantes 2003: 324-325).

The Code also specifically provides for the recognition of four local government units, namely: the provinces, the cities, the municipalities and the barangays. As such, they are collectively viewed as the political subdivisions of the Philippines.

The Code also provides for political empowerment of local citizens by promoting the "establishment and operation of people's and non-government organizations to become active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy." (LGC, Section 34). In addition, the LGC also allows local governments to enter into joint ventures and other co-operative arrangements with these POs and NGOs "in the delivery of certain basic services, capability building and livelihood projects and to develop local enterprises designed to improve productivity and income, diversify agricultures, spur rural industrialization, promote ecological balance and enhance the economic and social well being of the people" (Local Development Foundation 2000).

Local committees and special bodies with representatives from NGOs and the private sector have also been created by the Local Government Code. This includes the Local Pre-Qualification, Bids and Awards Committee; the Local School Board; the Local Health Board; the Local Development Council; the Local Peace and Order Council; and the People's Law Enforcement Board, just to name a few.

## Best Practices in Local Governance

Since its passage in 1991, the implementation of the LGC has yielded a number of “best practices” that are hailed by many as “patches of green” or “islands of good governance.”

*Gantimpalang Panglingkod Pook (Galing Pook)* is an award-giving program that acknowledges local government units that have excelled in implementing effective, innovative, high impact, participatory and sustainable projects and programs in following areas:

- health services,
- environmental management,
- public finance,
- peace initiatives
- integrated approach to development,
- sociocultural generation/ livelihood, and
- productivity improvement (Brillantes, 2003: 333).

These best practices in local governance have been attributed largely to two main success factors: leadership and citizenship.

A favorable political context that is facilitative of social mobilization sets the groundwork. A capable local chief executive provides the leadership that ensures:

- strategic outlook;
- well-managed stakeholders;
- result-oriented implementation; and
- efficient use of resources and government machinery.

Meanwhile, people’s participation in all stages of project management leads to initiatives that are:

- attuned to people’s needs and hence are relevant;
- owned by people and hence are sustained and reinforced;
- dynamic and innovative with new ideas generated through constant interaction between the government and the people;
- accountable by the people and transparent to the people.

There is a long list of *Galing Pook* awardees easily accessible through *Galing Pook* website and publication.<sup>1</sup> Some of the best practices in four LGUs (Naga City, Marikina City, Puerto Princesa and San Carlos City) with a clear interface between leadership and citizenship are shared below.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://galingpook.org/> for the Galing Pook website.

Naga City, also known as *Ang Maogmang Lugar* (The Happy Place), reinvented its bureaucracy through a productivity improvement program that (a) provides sufficient services to meet the requirements of the population; (2) getting optimum outputs with minimum expenditures; (3) producing quality results as desired and planned; and (4) making services accessible and acceptable based on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Naga has also strengthened the city government's participatory mechanisms by crafting the Naga City Citizens Charter as a guidebook on the 130 key services being offered by the LGU, including procedure, response time, government personnel responsible for each service, requirement checklist, schedule of fees, location maps of offices, feedback mechanism through customer feedback forms, and directory of city hall agencies. It has also an accreditation system for NGOs operating in the area and multi-level consultation channels wherein specific sectors, groups or even entire constituencies can participate in the identification of developmental priorities.

The *Sangguniang Panlungsod* of Naga also passed a local legislation dubbed as the Empowerment Ordinance that led to the formation of the Naga City People's Council. The said assembly is responsible for the appointment of NGO representatives in the city government's local special bodies; who in turn participates in the deliberation, conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of the projects, programs and activities of the LGU.

Lastly, Naga has the i-Governance Program that encourages ordinary citizens to participate in all manners of governance by providing a 24/7 venue for engagement and feedback gathering through the city website and short messaging service, access of which are made more available through the numerous cyber-schools and cyber-barangays.

Marikina City, which envisions itself to be a "Little Singapore," engages its public to be more active in ensuring an effective and efficient solid waste management system by imposing strict policies on waste collection and segregation. Households comply to these policies by following the schedule for garbage collection, as well as using separate bags for biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes, emptying cans and bottles first before disposing them, and wrapping broken glasses in paper before placing them in a separate garbage bag. The city also installed a feedback mechanism so that city officials can promptly address whatever concerns their citizens may have.

Puerto Princesa, which is known as the "Park-Like City" from the province of Palawan, intensified its campaign against illegal logging and slash-and-burn farming by providing alternative sources of livelihood for upland dwellers. The city government has also initiated a massive awareness campaign highlighting the importance of the environment, such as the annual Feast of the Forest, which mobilizes all stakeholders to plant trees within their two watersheds. The drive was so successful that about two million trees have been planted so far.

San Carlos City, aiming to be an agri-industrial zone in Negros Occidental province, implemented the Water Levy for Watershed Management Project. The project focuses on the development and rehabilitation of the city's watersheds that cover 5,017 hectares public land and 140.8 hectares private lands by using an innovative financing scheme. The initiative was propelled by the urgency to address denudation of the watershed areas, which serve as the main water source for domestic and agricultural consumers in and around the city. The project generated the collaboration of landowners who were willing to set a portion of their lands for protection forest in perpetual easements. Public participation was ensured through the created of the Community Watershed Management Association.

San Carlos City also successfully implemented the *Lote Para sa Mahirap: Land Banking in San Carlos City*, which was a multi-stakeholder project that benefited the most marginalized sectors of society from vendors to pedicab drivers to construction and dock workers. The program provided an opportunity to the landless to own a land by paying P5.00 a day for a period of five years, with the rest subsidized by the government along with nongovernment organizations.

### **Emerging Issue in Local Governance**

However, while these best practices serve as showcases for decentralization's full potential and as promising examples of local development, local governance is plagued by issues and problems that affect its performance. The challenge of creating and sustaining a critical mass of best practicing LGUs also raises doubts on how effective is the LGC-framed local governance as a strategy for uplifting the life of Filipinos and ushering national growth and development.

#### *Limited Public Participation in Local Councils*

Despite the strides that have been made in promoting greater participation among POs and NGOs at the local level, a large number of LGUs have yet to convene their local special bodies, which is often blamed on inadequate resources of LGUs. The LGC, moreover, does not provide any timetable for the complete operationalization of people's participation, and neither has the Code imposed any sanctions on the LGUs for their non-compliance (Tigno 1997: 124). As a consequence, only a third of civil society organizations have been able to choose their own representatives, since most of them were simply appointed by the local chief executive (Cariño undated).

This predicament is aggravated by the fact that these local development councils are often too large and unwieldy to be handled properly, thereby undermining the capacity of civil society groups to participate in the discussions.

There is also the hesitance on the part of both the LGUs and civil society organizations to trust each other's motivations, and cooperate on projects that could have benefited their respective constituencies. In fact there are even localities wherein mutual suspicion is so

severe that the local government has gone to the extent of establishing their own NGOs (Tapales 2003: 552). while NGOs, on the other hand, refuse to apply for the LGU's accreditation (Tigno 1997: 125).

### *Structural Inefficiency*

While the LGC has empowered local governments to reorganize their respective administrative structures, this is largely avoided because it is too politically costly for the incumbent officials. This, however, hinders the capacity of LGUs to effectively address the demands of their constituents. Their powers and functions have greatly expanded, though their institutional infrastructures remain obsolescent (Preschle and Sosmena 2005).

The three-year term of office for all elected local officials has also been a cause of concern, for it is not only perceived as an expensive way of exercising suffrage, it also undermines the ability of local officials to effectively govern. According to some experts, a typical official would spend his first year in office learning all the powers and functions of the office; the second year is usually devoted for planning the LGU's overall programs and initiatives; while the third year is often spent campaigning for re-election (Preschle and Sosmena 2005).

### *Fiscal and Financial Autonomy*

There is a wide consensus among scholars that the ability to generate local revenue is an important aspect of decentralization. The LGC empowers the LGUs to raise finances through the local capital market and collection of taxes, including property tax, business tax, amusement tax, franchise tax and taxes on professional fees. The most important revenue source that has been mandated by the Code is the increase in the LGUs' share of the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) to 40 percent and from the income derived from the exploitation of resources in their respective localities.

Other options that were made available to the LGUs include the creation of indebtedness through bond floatation, and the use of credit and grant facilities, including subsidies and joint loans. Local governments are also allowed to enter into joint ventures with each other, as well as with POs, NGOs and private institutions (Panadero 2006).

But despite these numerous financial windows that have been opened up for LGUs, most local governments are still largely dependent on their share from the IRA and on financial aid coming from abroad (Preschle and Sosmena 2005). Proponents of local governance would also point to the incomplete process of decentralization as evidenced by still centralized resources used often as a political tool by those in Malacañang. This is best illustrated in the case of the IRA wherein the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) would occasionally delay its release so as to cajole recalcitrant local officials and put pressure on the political opposition.

### *Limited Capacity*

Another weakness in the LGC implementation is the limited absorptive capacity of most local governments. A great deal of functions have been devolved to the LGUs. The question is whether the LGUs have enough capacity and resources to carry out these functions. Hence, alongside capacity-building, there should be fiscal decentralization—along the devolved functions, resources must flow from central government to the local governments. (Preschle and Sosmena 2005)

### *Accountability*

A number of local governments are also criticized for their lack of accountability mechanisms, which has often resulted in skewed prioritization by local officials. The gravity of this situation was highlighted in a study made in 1994, with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) stating that “short-term political interests and concerns were given priority over longer-term development goals” (quoted in Tigno 1997: 125) in most planning sessions of the LGUs. This, in effect, casts doubt on the capacity of most local governments to address rent-seeking and patronage politics, as well as instituting mechanism for transparency and good governance.

### *Impact on National Growth and Development*

Apart from the above-mentioned issues confronting most of Philippines LGUs, another crucial (if not the most important) limitation of the recent decentralization process is its inability to sustain and replicate the best practices that have so far appeared to the extent that it will create the “critical mass” that will have impact on national growth and development.

Up to this time, poverty continues to beset the country, especially the rural areas. The economy is kept afloat not by government policies, especially not by the performance of local governments, but through the overseas Filipinos workers’ remittances abroad that is dependent on the global economy.

The cases of extreme hunger and lack of access to health, education and social services remain rampant despite the decentralized service delivery system through local governance and people’s participation. While there are good things happening in some spots, at some point; while there are people receiving basic services for a certain period of time in some areas, the whole country continues to be in a quagmire of underdevelopment and poverty and there are no indications that this situation would change anytime soon.

### **Scattered Islands of Good Governance**

Since the 1960s, large areas of the Amazon have been denuded to make way for human settlements, cattle growing and soy production. To somehow offset the rapid rainforest depletion, a program was introduced involving forest fragmentation, wherein large acres

of the Amazon will be converted into non-forested areas, provided that forest patches (which are usually a hectare in size) will be left intact. Planners assumed that these forest patches would allow the rainforest to recuperate from the exploitation of timber, as well as preserve animal species that could otherwise be endangered.

But in 2006, a team of scientists from the National Institute for Amazonian Research in Manaus revealed a study which indicated that, “trees on fragment edges were dying nearly three times faster than their peers located inside a forest environment” (Anitei 2006). This, according to the team, is brought about by the blistering winds from the surrounding pastures that eventually kill the trees. Meanwhile, animals and insects, which are best adapted in environments with large forests covers, are trapped within these patches and eventually die out, as these fragments further dwindle.

Applying this analogy, these best practices may prove to be unsustainable in the long run, for they continue to confront socio-political realities that are endemic in Philippine politics, such as the highly personalistic character of local politics, the primacy of kinship, the prevalence of patron-client relations and the persistent culture of machismo, especially in the rural areas. All of which paint a traditional, patronage-based society that shape and affect politics and governance.

This explains why all the existing best practices are not sustained and replicated to create a critical mass that will usher national growth and development. They are mere scattered islands of good governance in a raging sea of patronage politics.

On this score, the case of Naga vis-à-vis the Bicol Region is one fine example.

Considered as the most dynamic LGU in the Bicol region, Naga had achieved a growth rate of 6.5 percent in 1997, despite the onslaught of the Asian financial crisis. And in 2004, it pegged a gross city product that was 115 percent higher than the national average. In addition, the City has approximately 5,000 business establishments, and a telephone pr household ratio of 1:1. Naga was also cited by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) as the Most Business-Friendly City for 2002, 2003 and 2005, which earned it a place in the latter’s Hall of Fame. (Isaac and Acheron 2007: 8).

Yet, despite the effort that it has made in forming Metro Naga, the economic success that the City has achieved had yet to be equaled by its neighboring LGUs, much more in the whole of Bicol. In fact, in 2003 alone, the poverty incidence in the whole region was pegged at 40.6 percent, which affected 383,625 families, according to the National Statistics Coordinating Board or NSCB (Isaac and Acheron 2007: 15).

But more than the issue of replication, an even more pressing problem facing these model LGUs is the question of sustainability, since there are indications that these “patches of green” can eventually succumb to old school clientilism and *trapo* politics. The case of Isabela Governor Grace Padaca, for instance, provides stark example.

In 2004, the former accountant-turned-radio commentator joined the gubernatorial race

against the incumbent Faustino Dy, whose family has dominated Isabela politics since the 1960s through their control of the province's logging industry (Coronel et al. 2004: 63-66). Gaining the support of the various religious denominations and a number of local POs and non-governmental organizations, Padaca won over Dy with a very slim margin of 1,285 votes. Shortly after getting elected, the new Governor vowed to rid Isabela of jueteng and pay the debts that the provincial government has incurred during the heyday of the Dys.

Initially seen as a crusader against dynastic politics and an advocate of good governance, Padaca however made a 180-degree turn shortly before her reelection bid in 2007; first by leaving *Aksyon Demokratiko* to joining the Liberal Party, and then forging an alliance with the Albanos which happens to be one of the oldest and most powerful clans in Isabela.

A slightly different yet equally challenging predicament is also being faced by current Pampanga Governor Eddie "Among Ed" Panlilio. A Catholic cleric who used to head the Social Action Center of Pampanga (SACOP), Among Ed ran for the gubernatorial post in 2007 against provincial board member Lilia Pineda (wife of suspected jueteng kingpin Bong Pineda) and incumbent governor Mark Lapid—both of whom were close allies of President Arroyo who also hails from Pampanga. Vowing to help redeem the province's tarnished image as the "Vatican of Jueteng," Among Ed won over his closest opponent with just 1,147 votes.

After his inauguration on June 30 of last year as the 26<sup>th</sup> governor of Pampanga, Among Ed immediately went to work and in just three months, the provincial government was able to collect Php66.54 million in taxes from quarry operators (Pamisauapan 2007: 3). This meant a daily collection of approximately one million pesos (2007: 13), surpassing the Php29.1 million collected by the administration former governor Mark Lapid for the entire year of 2006.

But despite these achievements, Among Ed soon lost the support of the *Sangguniang Panlalawigan*, which voted unanimously on September 21, 2007 to grant mayors greater authority over quarry operators and delete the provincial government's Php150 administrative fee per truckload.

Indeed, Among Ed's initial victory may have been dramatic and inspiring, but his uncanny style of politics remains fragile and unsteady. This predicament of his (which is also shared by Mayor Robredo and Governor Padaca) proves that "stand-alone efforts are likely to be vulnerable to state capture. Isolated islands of reform can provide valuable demonstration effect but may only survive a brief period of reform before being swamped by inefficiencies at other levels (Gonzales 2002: 386).

This particularly raises the question of whether the legal framework on decentralization provided by the LGC is sufficient to enable effective local governance that can withstand patronage-based politics found at all levels of society to enable local governments to post a clear impact on growth and development. Or is the logic of decentralization needs to be

extended to a shift to federalism?

## Framing a Way Forward

### The Ateneo School of Government Vision

The Ateneo School of Government is the Ateneo de Manila University's professional school for leadership and public service. It envisions to be the partner for advocates of reform and ethical leadership in National and Local Governments toward transformation in community. Its mission is to work closely with effective and ethical leaders building prosperous and just communities throughout the Philippines. It tries to help these leaders build enabling conditions for wealth creation, deliver basic services effectively, and ensure democratic access to opportunities and to justice.

The ASoG proposed strategy for development is a mosaic approach that transform communities to build a nation. The mosaic approach to development means building the country community by community, municipality by municipality, city by city, province by province and linking islands of good governance. It is an explicit strategy to link effective and ethical leaders throughout the country, a demand-side strategy - a consequence of experiencing good governance at the local level to create demand for national reform supporting emerging leaders. By sourcing national leaders from local governments, the country's leadership pool is diversified. It also involves working with national institutions and organizations on key areas where governance innovations at the national level have a direct impact on enabling local governments to create wealth and deliver basic services.

### *Overcoming Patronage through Strong Democratic Institutions*

Structures and institutions of politics and government are powerful in shaping actions and outcomes. As colloquially remarked, you put a good person in a bad system, the norm is for the person to turn bad; while you put a bad person in a good system, the person will most likely be forced to be good. The situation of patches of green in a murky ecology that limits the sustainability and reach of effective local governance points to the imperatives of building and strengthening modern democratic institutions and reconfiguring the government's structural design.

As opposed to traditional politics, which relies on patronage and personalities, modern politics is program-, issue- and merit-based and relies on modern democratic institutions such as political parties and electoral system, professionalized bureaucracy and effective accountability mechanisms. While traditional politics limits the access to power for those who come from political dynasties and old elites, political modernization is the process of diversifying representation in government for a more pluralist and participatory exercise of democracy.

Developing a well-functioning bureaucracy is significant in any reform endeavor for the simple reason that it remains the most efficient machinery for large-scale operations like that of the government. A professionalized bureaucracy is designed to deliver services and implement policies efficiently, effectively and economically. Philippine bureaucracy remains weak and unable to withstand political pressures, leading to inefficiencies and graft and corruption.

The political parties serve as a mechanism that screens those who present themselves as qualified candidates for public posts. Given a diverse society, political parties are organized mechanisms to aggregate interests and develop a platform of government that serves as a basis for governance. In the Philippines, political parties have remained weak

and underdeveloped because the legal and institutional contexts in which they operate are not conducive for their growth and development. The continued underdevelopment of our party system, have had two consequences. First, this has allowed a few political families to dominate local politics and determine policies at the national level. Second, in their attempt to fill a role in the political process, parties have become a supporting mechanism of the existing patronage system.

The electoral system determines how public posts are filled up, hence structures the allocation and distribution of power. Results of elections in post-colonial Philippines have always been doubted leading to questionable legitimacy of political leadership. The country's simple plurality or first-pass-the-post system yields a minority political leadership that is automatically opposed by the majority of citizens.

Public office is a public trust and hence accountability mechanisms have to be established so that the exercise of power can be checked and accounted for. State accountability mechanisms in the Philippines are limited in checking abuse and misuse of power. No accountability mechanism can check and balance the over-powerful Philippine presidency. The Philippines presidency can easily trample on accountability mechanisms such as check-and-balance and through power of appointments control independent Constitutional bodies like the Ombudsman and Commission of Human Rights (CHR). It is due to weak state accountability mechanisms that social accountability has emerged. It is the process by which citizens exact accountability from the government through civil society accountability initiatives in collaboration with the government.

#### Government Watch

Government Watch or G-Watch is an approach to strengthening of bureaucracy that institutes transparency and accountability mechanisms in the programs and service-delivery of the government through citizens-government engagement. G-Watch has been successfully applied in specific program or service delivery of the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), where it yielded tangible and lasting results that ensure the transparency and accountability of the systems. It is currently being tested in the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), particularly on its budget system.

Most notable among the G-Watch accomplishments is *DepEd's Textbook Count: National Monitoring of Textbook Delivery*. In Textbook Count, the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) are integrated in all the stages of the program implementation for transparency, efficiency and system improvement.

The Ateneo School of Government (ASoG), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), established the G-Watch program in 2000 in response to the plethora of reports of government corruption and inefficiency. It is conceived along the principle of corruption *prevention* through systems reform and the institutionalization and strengthening of these reforms.

#### *Establishing a Developmental and Democratic State*

The effort of building this specific set of institutions may be defined as nation-building—a process of strengthening the capacity of the state to achieve greater control, efficiency and production. Nation-building requires capacitating the state to perform its role in national development by enforcing clear, stable and predictable rules as so as to create a vibrant and dynamic economic environment. Nation-building involves nurturing of unity

among the people towards a common direction for common good. In particular, this nation-building is towards the formation of a developmental and democratic state.

Unfortunately, the Philippine state remains weak for two major reasons: (1) it is unable to withstand assault by particularistic elite interests; and (2) the lack of popular support and the absence of common purpose among Filipinos due to the public's alienation from the state leadership.

Filipinos have long discredited, and so have detached itself from, Philippine political leadership. Trust and confidence in government officials has always been low. Surveys need not say so. Post-EDSA II Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has been the most unpopular due to the countless controversies that hounded her administration. The Social Weather Station survey done from 27 to 30 June 2008 put the net satisfaction rating of GMA at all-time low of -38%, surpassing the previous record of -33% in May 2005. The net satisfaction with general performance of the national administration is also at its record low of -21%.

Because of this widespread public dissatisfaction and detachment from politics, it is almost impossible for the state to rally the people under a common banner. Ramos was relatively successful in his Philippines 2000, but GMA failed big time with her Strong Republic.

Strong Republic, though theoretically laudable as it tried to free the state from particularistic interests, ultimately failed due to the absence of strong mandate and moral ascendancy of the political leadership.

The failure of Arroyo's Strong Republic that is founded on developmental state model points to some pre-requisites of building a developmental state. It cannot be led by the same people who it tries to insulate the state from. Bluntly speaking, the traditional political elites cannot be the leaders of the formation of developmental state. The traditional political elites had their shot and failed in bringing growth and development to the Philippines.

#### *Developmental State in Deepened Democracy*

The building of a developmental state must be done within the framework of deepening democracy in the Philippines. Democratic deepening entails the strengthening and enhancing of formal and procedural democracy towards substantive democracy, which is a more egalitarian order with "high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories" (Quimpo 2008: 16). Contemporary philosophers Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, for their part, advance the concept of radical and plural democracy, which is "a struggle for radicalising the principles of liberty and equality for all by extending them to more and more social relations." (Mouffe 1993: 114).

Radical democracy provides an approach to democratization that accepts the necessity and validity of limited struggles within the liberal democratic framework towards a more

participatory and egalitarian order. The process of change could start with the existing institutions, being reformed and strengthened in the process of state-society engagement. From the objective of ensuring political rights and democratic processes, the change process could proceed to goals that are economic and social in nature, thereby applying liberty and equality to more social relations. This is how radical democracy liberalism and socialism unites reform and revolution. It dissolves the notion of revolution as the “grand moment,” but look at it as “moments,” the gradual processes of reform that lead to radical changes (Quimpo 2008: 89).

In today’s dispensation, only forces that are reformist, modernizing and democratic can usher the maturity of a strong developmental state, which remains the most viable mechanism for growth and development. It is a state that provides a good foundation for decentralized actions by forging synergy and integration towards a more purposive and directed process of economic growth and development.

### *Connecting Diverse and Broad Reform Movements*

The first order of business then is to find and mold these reformist, modernizing and democratic forces that will establish a developmental and democratic state.

These forces are the reform and radical democratic movements in the local government units, within the bureaucracy, in the civil society and social movements and perhaps even among the circles of a few modernizing elites. These movements, which continue to be vibrant and alive, are characterized by the strong fervor for change with its anti-traditional politics brand, thus providing its modernizing and reformist element. These movements are democratic for they live by and breathe the democratic values that enabled them in the first place.

However, these movements are diverse, scattered, uncoordinated and without direction. For these movements to become a tool for political modernization, they must

#### **KAYA NATIN!**

Kaya Natin! is a movement promoting effective and ethical leadership in the Philippine government. Convened by the Ateneo de Manila University – School of Government, the movement is composed of Filipino volunteers from all over the world who believe that good governance is still possible. As a group, Kaya Natin! strives to promote genuine and lasting change in our government not by destroying institutions but by promoting transparency, social accountability, people empowerment and electoral reforms. By upholding these values and principles, it hopes to help make our government and our leaders more responsive to the needs of the Filipino people and enable it to deliver basic services to those who need it most in the most efficient and effective way.

In order to inspire and empower people, the group has dedicated Champions of Good Governance, local government officials who embody effective and ethical leadership, who go around campuses and institutions to share their experiences as public servants. The Caravan of Good Governance, as these forums are called, aims to raise awareness among the Filipino people, particularly the youth, on the best practices of good governance based on the experiences of the Kaya Natin! Champions.

Aside from educating the people, Kaya Natin! believes that Filipinos have the ability not just to support good leaders, but to contribute to the progress and development of the country by being good citizens themselves. Good governance is not only good leadership, but good citizenship as well. Kaya Natin! hopes that every Filipino would be empowered to choose effective and ethical leaders for the country, that we may begin to rebuild the nation for future generations.

*By: Kai Pastores, ASoG Youth Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship*

**EXCERPTS FROM...**

**A Case for Serious Political Party Building**

Reflections on the *Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series*

By: Joy Acheron

The seeming “democratic rollback” in the country under the current administration poses serious threats to civil liberties and political rights that constrict the space for non-partisan and “harmonious” civil society work; hence more than ever, the fundamental significance of partisan political work by civil society actors requires serious consideration. Institutions of democracy are weakened, as repeatedly pointed by advocates and scholars; and the serious implication of this on citizens’ participation is that without the restoration of these institutions to their supposed form, citizens’ engagement with these institutions could be distracting to the real reform work and thus could be destructive to democratization.

The imperative of partisan electoral work is further underscored given the seemingly insignificant democratic change in the country’s power structure....

Given the limitation of resources, the narrow ranks of reformers and reform-oriented groups and with formidable forces whose interests lie on keeping the status quo, there is a need to prioritize and to concentrate efforts. Both the conjuncture and the capacity of reform and progressive movements make it imperative to identify a focus and locus of efforts.

What is probably the most important lesson generated from the discussion is **the need to extend the logic of electoral engagement of civil society actors to political party formation—organization, political strategy formulation, platform development and preparing to govern.** “Partisan civil society” phenomenon should be appreciated as just a temporary solution to the underperforming political parties and barely existing party system in the Philippines and hence just a beginning of serious electoral engagements.

The historical account of the experience pinned down the limits of partisan electoral engagements of civil society such as the lack of effective machinery in converting mass base to votes and the absence of a permanent collective that could support those who “crossover” to government particularly in dealing with the balance of power within and outside the government.

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*Posted on Inquirer.net. Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series is a project of Political Democracy and Reform (PODER). PODER is an action research and advocacy program of the Ateneo School of Government that provides a venue for the meeting of the minds and united action of political leaders from government and civil society on the ways and means to strengthen systems by which power is allocated and distributed. Its main areas of advocacy are electoral reform, party development and charter change.*

be able to breed unity in diversity, find a common vision for the country, develop effective coordination and synergy of action and establish a clear direction.

This direction will have to be political. It should offer an alternative leadership that would serve as a counter-veiling force to the status quo.

This attempt of establishing synergy and linkages among the various reform efforts is akin to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (1997: 161), which asserts that a subordinate sector in society can only gain national preeminence if it is able to gain the support of other classes and social forces. This then leads to the formation of what he describes as the historic bloc—that is, the ensemble of class and sectoral alliances serving as the most organized expression of counter-hegemony (1997: 168).

*Forming an Organized Effort to Contest State Power*

But in order to transform its vision into concrete reality, this new historic bloc would inevitably have to contest state power and gain control of the national government since the “structures of the state—its institutional arrangements, the actors who have major roles in its institutions, and its policy activities—are autonomous and have fundamental impacts on political, economic, and social life” (Danziger 2001: 152).

The best organizational form for any historic bloc is a political party since its specifically constituted for the attainment of power. Gramsci’s, for his part, describes this political party as the “Modern Prince,” in opposition to

Machiavelli’s old medieval *Prince*. This is so for a Prince is designed to lead; but the

bureaucratic complexity of the modern state can never be mastered by a lone crowned sovereign. Instead, its functions would have to be carried out through a collective leadership, which only a party can provide (1997: 129-130).

Following the radical democracy framework, this party should be an integration of the reform movements on the ground with the liberal goals, but with a vision of applying democratic values to more and more social relations. However, the synergy and integration must be done with respect for diversity and plurality. For it to be broad, inclusive and democratic, the different no struggle must be viewed as supreme than the other. The different struggles and advocacy must be connected and integrated to belong to the same family. The bringing together of these forces must foster a “democratic culture in which a plurality of social struggles are perceived and lived as belonging to the same family” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 176).

Once this political machinery of reform movements in the Philippines win power, it has both the broad social base and moral ascendancy to bring a developmental and democratic state which can usher growth and development in the country and which can effectively lead the process of nation-building.

The makings of that Modern Prince (which is not one person but a multiplicity of individuals and organizations all over the archipelago) here in the Philippines will ultimately depend on today’s generation of leaders and reformers. The movement for nation-building would have to be led by reformist leaders from the different LGUs, the bureaucracy, the citizen sector, and even among the circles of some modernizing elites, and that they would have to develop a system of synergy and interdependence whose best organizational expression is a political party that unifies all the progressive and democratic elements in Philippines society. This is a formidable challenge, but it has to be done. By building on the basics, we will change the Philippines.

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